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SUBJECT: (U) DEPUTY SECRETARY STEINBERG'S MEETING WITH
IRAQI COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES MEMBER QASIM DAUD

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Gary A. Grappo. Reason 1.4
. (b), (d).

11. (U) Date and Venue: September 17, 2009; 11:00 a.m.;
Baghdad, Iraq.

12. (U) Participants:

U.S.

Dr. James Steinberg, Deputy Secretary

Amb. Gary A. Grappo, POL M/C

Elissa Slotkin, NEA Senior Advisor for Iraq and Regional
Affairs

Mike Castiglione, Embassy notetaker

IRAQ

Qasim Daud, Council of Representatives member

Mohammad Daud, son of Qasim Daud

13. (C) SUMMARY: During a September 17 meeting in Baghdad, Council of Representatives (COR) member Qasim Daud told Deputy Secretary Steinberg of the trend among Iraqi leaders to portray themselves as "national" and "secular" and highlighted the potential for cross-sectarian political cooperation. Daud, a member of the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), explained that the INA wishes to include Kurdish and Sunni Arab blocs and will campaign against the "incompetence" of the current government. He said some in the COR want to maintain a "closed list" for the January 2010 national election and are using disputes over voter registration in Kirkuk to delay a new election law. Daud warned of a coming "war" in the COR between the INA and factions loyal to PM Maliki. Steinberg stressed the U.S. commitment to Iraq and the Security Agreement (SA), and the importance of promptly adopting an election law. END SUMMARY.

INA to Emphasize National, Secular Character

14. (C) Daud noted that during the 2005 national election in Iraq, sectarianism was the dominant political theme. The Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) was formed as a Shia bloc and only later tried to recruit some Sunni representation. Daud explained that this effort failed because these Sunnis were shunned by their communities and targeted for assassination. In contrast, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) formed for the January 2010 national election, Daud claimed, already has 25 Sunni members, is purposefully putting forth a secular face, and is using "nationalist" rhetoric. Daud said the INA's strategy is to first establish itself as a credible bloc and then create alliances across communities with other credible blocs; the INA hopes to broaden its party membership within 4-6 weeks. Daud claimed the INA has received "positive signs" from the Kurds, and is talking to the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and the Sons of Iraq (SOI). He elaborated that the INA, including many of its Islamist members, is trying to recruit former PM Ayad Allawi to expand the standing of secularists within the alliance, although Daud remained skeptical that Allawi would join.

Emergence of Cross-Sectarian Cooperation

¶15. (C) The Deputy Secretary stated that Iraq's long-term political challenge will be to allow for issue-based politics and alliances, and to prevent the major parties from merely representing each of the ethno-sectarian groups. He warned that how coalitions campaign, especially the rhetoric they use, will be important in whether they are viewed as sectarian or national. Daud responded that there is increasing cooperation across ethno-sectarian groups. In 2004, Daud said, Sunni and Shia officials in the COR did not talk to each other but now there are cross-cutting social relationships and short-term alliances between these groups based on specific issues.

QSeeks to Reverse "Incompetent" Maliki Government

¶16. (C) Daud predicted the INA will campaign on a "nationalist" platform for a more "competent government." He criticized the Maliki government as incompetent, corrupt, and lacking a long-term plan, especially regarding economic development. Daud alleged that the Prime Minister had violated the Iraqi constitution 52 times.

¶17. (C) Daud claimed that Maliki "fabricated evidence" to link Syria and Ba'thists to the August 19 terror attacks. Maliki's greatest source of popularity is the credit he gets

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for the improvement in security, even though U.S. Generals Petraeus and Odierno were actually responsible for this. After the August 19 bombings, Daud continued, Maliki wanted to deflect blame away from his security efforts and portray himself as a hero by finding the culprits. Daud agreed that Syria is playing a "destructive role" in Iraq and said he is pleased Damascus was under pressure. He warned, however, that relying on false confessions is a dangerous practice.

U.S. Can Defend Iraq's Progress

¶18. (C) Daud said he personally believes the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA) should be extended to 2025 because of the unreadiness of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), but realized the political unpopularity of such a position. He said foreign investment is needed quickly and that the GOI and USG must counteract the perception that foreign companies merely want to "steal Iraq's oil." Daud asked for firm U.S. support for the national election, especially assistance in protecting Iraq from interference from neighboring governments, including Saudi Arabia and Iran, that fear Iraqi democracy will undermine their own rule. The Deputy Secretary replied that the United States has a direct stake in Iraq's success and reiterated U.S. commitment to the Security Agreement and to upholding Iraq's sovereignty.

Kirkuk Being Used to Keep Closed List Election

¶19. (C) Responding to the Deputy Secretary's question on the status of a national election law, Daud responded that many Iraqi politicians say they want "open" lists (i.e., a system in which voters choose individual candidates listed by parties/coalitions) but really want "closed" lists so that the parties can determine who will represent them in the parliament. Because Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has called for open lists, Shia COR members cannot vote for closed lists. Therefore, many are refusing to accept compromises on voter participation and seat allocation in

Kirkuk in order to delay legislation and create a technical reason for why the COR failed to adopt open lists, he said. (Note: Some Iraqi Arabs and Turkomen claim that more than 300,000 Kurds have moved to Kirkuk in the last few years and seek to block these new residents from voting in the province. End Note.) Daud stated there is probably no solution to the Kirkuk issue unless the COR falls back on the 2005 closed list election law; he claimed Arab and Turkomen in Kirkuk would agree to use the 2005 voter registration in the province. Steinberg pressed Daud to exert his leadership in moving the COR to promptly agree on an election law.

Likely Maliki-INA "War" in Parliament

¶10. (C) Asked whether the COR can address other important legislation, including on hydrocarbons, before the election, Daud said a likely "war between the Prime Minister and INA" will divert attention from new laws. Maliki is trying to position himself for a second term as PM while the INA is trying to embarrass him before the January vote, Daud commented. He predicted the COR in the coming weeks will resume questioning Cabinet officials, potentially leading to a no-confidence vote against a minister, and added that the COR will seek to prevent Maliki from using government funds for election purposes. Daud also stated that the COR will likely examine members of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), although he agreed with the Deputy Secretary that attacking IHEC just ahead an election risks weakening the commission's capacity.
HILL